



Republic of Maldives

Fifty-fifth Session of the *the Status of Women 2011*

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, and stakeholders in the movement to empower women,

The three pillars of the United Nations – peace and security, human rights and development – constitute the basis of all humankind. In our common pursuit of the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals for Action, we secure the foundation essential to principal notions of freedom from want and freedom from fear. If our shared quest to eliminate violence against women and to gender equality in education and labour, we underscore the inextricable link between security, preconditions for peoples, nations and individuals to live in dignity. Living in fear cannot focus on her education, an educated woman cannot make informed decisions for herself, her family, or her community, and an underemployed woman will always struggle for sustainable development.

*Security and Peace: Progress in the elimination of violence against women and girls*

Mr. Chairman,

Recent studies show that “one in three Maldivian women aged 15 years or above have experienced sexual abuse in her lifetime.<sup>1</sup> In response, the Maldives amended its criminal sentencing guidelines to provide more appropriate punishments of perpetrators. Additionally, our draft Bill is in the final stages of establishing the Domestic Violence Bill, which for the first time will allow for the recording of such cases and publication of annual statistics. This will provide the basis of more informed policy choices comprehensively addressing this serious problem.

Nevertheless, Mr. Chairman, the intentions of these bills have no meaning without the proper delivery systems. The simple fact is, that we in the Maldives must do more to ensure an equitable and accessible public justice system empowered to investigate and prosecute cases of violence against women and girls. We look to the various countries working with our partners to bring our institutional and policy capacities in line with the challenges to our women and girls.

*Human Rights: Progress in access to education and decent work*

Mr. Chairman,

The Maldives holds the second-highest rank on the UN Gender-related Development Index in the South Asian region.<sup>2</sup> This is underpinned by the fact that there is no institutional discrimination on any gender lines in access to education, health services, or for work in tertiary education, and this past December also marks the inauguration of the National University, which allowed Maldives to recently open the doors of its first university.

<sup>1</sup> E/ICEF/2010/7/L.20, UNICEF Country Programme Document for the Republic of Maldives, page 4

<sup>2</sup> Asian Development Bank, Strategy and Policy Framework for Sustainable Growth

However, stereotyping of women's roles in society threaten to erode our gains and erect obstacles to future progress. In Maldivian society, the domestic domain continues to be seen as the domain of women. In Maldivian society, and it is estimated that less than 4% of men contribute to household tasks and work. Thus, even where literacy and education opportunities are available, women that must juggle work and household may find it too demanding to continue higher education.

Female participation in the labour force has nearly doubled over the last twenty years, but unemployment is also almost twice as much. This could be because men continue to dominate employment in sectors such as tourism and construction, which are some of the fastest growing employment sectors in the country. To address this, the government has undertaken the Gender Empowerment Programme, in collaboration with UNDP, aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship development and business skills.

**Development: Political Development**

At the local level, the low level of women in Parliament is a barrier to female parliamentarians. This deficit continues to buttress the barriers women face, because without the inclusion of women's perspectives, policies will be due to lack the manufacturing approaches required to address the complex social, political and economic needs of our country.

To this end, attempts have been made to increase women's political awareness through a series of measures, such as, but not limited to, dealing with the source of this current deficit. For example, there are programmes that families are removing girls from school, including extra-curricular activities that are meant to develop leadership skills. We believe that religious extremism that shapes negative attitudes towards women and girls forms the genesis of this devolution towards female participation and mend attitudes.

Mr Chairman, the women's active engagement in leadership and decision-making at every level, and was inspired by the creation of JIN Women. We anticipate meaningful participation when new initiatives are taken to ensure the responsibility to ensure that women and girls are safe in our communities, and feel supported and encouraged to take their rightful places in our classrooms, at decision-making tables in our boardrooms, and in our government.